

A North End Perspective: Interview with Jessica Dello Russo

Harpichord 00:00

[Intro Music]

Tegan 00:08

Welcome back to Revere House Radio. I'm your host, Tegan Kehoe, and in this episode, I'm talking with Jessica Dello Russo, who is a neighbor of ours in the North End neighborhood of Boston, and has a background in history and archeology. At the time we recorded this episode, she was an active board member with the North End Historical Society. She served on the board from 2022 through earlier this year. Welcome to the show, Jessica.

Jessica 00:32

Thank you, Tegan, it's great to be here.

Tegan 00:34

So I want to start off by asking, can you tell me about your relationship to the North End?

Jessica 00:38

Yes, my relationship goes back several generations, when talking about my family. And that's relevant to me personally, because I grew up with really a lot of relatives around the North Square area. And, in part, that was because our church was here. We were attending the Sacred Heart Church, which is just across the square. And that my grandfather -- great grandfather, actually, Nicola -- who was an Italian immigrant, opened a tavern for the sailors right down on Lewis Street. And my family has always maintained....Nina, Nina has yet to be convinced- (laughs)

Tegan 01:19

Yes, Nina, our Executive Director, always looks at any potential new information about Paul Revere with a researcher's skepticism. But please continue.

Jessica 01:28

My family has maintained that it's on the site of Paul Revere's shop at the tip of Clark's tidal wharf. So we have a library, like thousands of volumes of history of Boston, that people have either given us over the years or we've acquired one way or another from both sides of the family. So I grew up really immersed in this awareness of how, you know, what was there to discover in this area? What was there to see, I guess, and understand just by being here and observing?

Tegan 02:04

That's really cool. And my impression is that there was several generations when it was very common in the North End to have a family here for several generations. And that...late 19th Century through maybe mid to late 20th Century, that was common for a lot of families, and is a bit less so now. But did you know a lot of people growing up who also had multi-generation roots in this neighborhood?

Jessica 02:25

It's funny, I was kind of caught in the tide-

Tegan 02:28

Oh yeah? In between?

Jessica 02:28

Between the old traditional kind of North End three- or four-generation family in one house, which is, to be honest, still, what we have in my building today. You know, my parents, one of my sisters, me and my son...we're, you know, kind of on top of each other. But just to throw out an example, my sister texted me and said, "I didn't go to work today. I felt sick to my stomach. I feel pretty dehydrated. Can you, you know, get me some Gatorade?" So absolutely, like-

Tegan 02:52

Yeah!

Jessica 02:52

-you know, the closeness can really be supportive of each other and, kind of, keep multi-generational perspective, really, on life.

Tegan 03:05

Yeah.

Jessica 03:05

And that's what I've done for my son. But I grew up in kind of like the bridge between the mid-70s and mid-80s. That was the era that the word "yuppie" started to be used a lot in the North End-

Tegan 03:17

(Laughs)

Jessica 03:17

-because the waterfront, by that point...massive project to requalify, repurpose, I guess, the waterfront was pretty much done. And new people were moving in, including us, because we moved from North Street -- hence the being right next to Paul Revere's house, practically. We moved to Fulton Street, which was previously known, you know, through like the mid-20th Century, it was ghost town. Because a lot of the businesses and major companies that had operated in that area, really because of its vicinity to the freight lines that ran down the waterfront, and also, of course, to Quincy Market. The market moved out. So these businesses likewise. So they had a lot of derelict buildings. So that was the new North End. And even today, I...I meet people who say, "You're from the North End? I don't remember you." And it was really because we...one block! Keep in mind, North Street is one street over from Fulton Street-

Tegan 04:23

Yeah, yeah.

Jessica 04:23

-but there was still that memory of it being, you know, a very distinctly business...It would be kind of like living downtown today. And in 2025, my reaction is similar when someone says to me, they live on High Street. Those are all skyscrapers and offices. You know, the city moves on. But our habits, you know, we have this strong sense of territory. I'm sure you guys have picked that up.

Tegan 04:47

Yeah. And my impression is that, especially historically, the North End is very, kind of, hyper-specific in the way that people think of where they're from, and so-

Jessica 04:57

Street by street. And I really see that. Some of it's parish by parish, and there used to be more kind of active churches. Sacred Heart, of course, is no longer an active parish. But that was a very distinctive group, as opposed to, one block away. St Leonard's, which I don't think I even went to until I was maybe in my teens, maybe for a friend's confirmation or something. I had a church. (Laughs)

Tegan 05:25

Right.

Jessica 05:25

And not only that, my grandfather was a member of the St Mark's society. So he got to do all of those, like, boss things, like passing around the collection basket and doing the ushering and stuff. So we always sat in the back and felt very like, you know, we were observing everything around us.

Tegan 05:43

Yeah, that's great!

Jessica 05:44

But in that little micro-world, there was a lot that influenced me in what I did later on. You know, kind of the way you take your first steps out into the bigger world.

Tegan 05:56

Yeah. No, that's, that's very cool.

Jessica 05:58

The Revere House is actually...because I do remember as a kid going to the Revere House.

Tegan 06:02

Oh, yeah?

Jessica 06:02

That was a great thing, because it was like going to my great aunt's attic. She had a horse-hair mattress, she had all these very old Victorianish knick knacks. Yeah. It was another way you could kind of identify with the Revere Family, is that they were like any family who has, you know, many generations in the same place, and a lot of...not junk, but, you know, objects around that-

Tegan 06:28

Right.

Jessica 06:28

-you could tell stories about.

Tegan 06:30

Yeah, yeah, absolutely. I often hear visitors in the house remarking that something -- some piece of furniture, or the floral pattern in the slip covers on the furniture -- reminds them of something, you know, their grandmother had. And I'm thinking, "your grandmother was definitely not alive in the American Revolution. You were not that old."

Jessica 06:47

(Laughs.)

Tegan 06:48

But styles are cyclical, for one, and so something that, you know, your grandmother had had gone out of fashion and come back in again. And then there are some things that they had a practical reason for being done a certain way. And then technology has changed, and so there isn't that necessity anymore, but those practical reasons sometimes were around in our grandparents day or...I think the different styles of mattress is an example of that. That's not necessarily a style that has come in and out, but just-

Jessica 07:17

It should come back. Because, pet peeve here, for my fellow North Enders...man, we throw away hundreds of mattresses over here. (Laughs)

Tegan 07:26

Yeah. (Laughs)

Jessica 07:27

You know, putting them out on the curb. So maybe we should go back to Revere's straw mattress or horse hair, whatever-

Tegan 07:34

Yeah.

Jessica 07:34

-and keep it maybe a little bit longer, or unstuff it. (Laughs)

Tegan 07:37

(Laughs) Right, yeah, unstuff and re-stuff, which was often what they would do in Revere's day. Yeah.

Jessica 07:42

I know, yeah.

Tegan 07:43

Yeah. And we touched on this a little bit, but the North End has seen a lot of changes in the past, you know, 50 years or so. And of course, it has been changing for centuries. I mean, when Paul Revere lived here, this was the main neighborhood of Boston, and so it didn't have that hyper-specificity. Everyone was living on top of everyone else. Paul Revere lived two blocks away from the governor's mansion. And then it was a newcomer neighborhood for really, all of the 19th Century. And then the Italian newcomers put down roots in a way that the other immigrant groups hadn't in the North End, for quite some time.

Jessica 08:15

I mean, Revere was a walker. I...He wouldn't have thought twice about crossing...I mean, his store was up around Cornhill for a while, I think. And then he, you know, he moved around his real estate...I want to say Union Street, for a while. He might have had a shop there. Yeah, he never stopped moving. (Laughs)

Tegan 08:31

Right, his hardware store, and then later the business offices of his foundry and his copper business. So lots of things going on.

Jessica 08:37

My feeling is, like, the North End, yes, was physically distinct. But people, people walked then. And yeah, I mean the transformation...just thinking about Revere's house. Not just this house, which you guys have beautifully documented the different tenants that occupied that space. Because, of course, it was built after Revere's death, you know, on land... probably remains of his, like, back gardens.

Tegan 09:01

Yes, yeah! So our visitor center, which is where we're recording right now, was built in 1835.

Jessica 09:06

Yeah, and that's...he died in 1818.

Tegan 09:09

Mhmm!

Jessica 09:09

You know, what fascinates me is his other house. You know, I always think, what would the Paul Revere House be like if it had been the other house, that brick mansion?

Tegan 09:19

Right, yeah, that he bought in 1800.

Jessica 09:21

Similarly, he was not the first occupant of the house, but it was a three story brick. His estate records show what was inside it, some of which is here. Although not the Washington urn. I would always love to see...there's this, like, I think it's Esther Forbes whose, you know, wonderful "Paul Revere and the World He Lived In"...she describes the, you know, the presence of this giant marble urn in the parlor which...

Tegan 09:47

Yeah.

Jessica 09:48

He was proud of his revolutionary Patriot roots.

Tegan 09:51

Yeah, absolutely.

Jessica 09:51

And that was a sign. But just to say, "what kind of Revere would that have presented?" And it's always kind of, you know, this Revere, the Revere of North Square.

Tegan 10:02

He's humbler than the later-in-life Revere.

Jessica 10:05

Maybe. I mean this, this towering ambition...I mean, this guy did not take failure. And I think that's why North Enders...his popularity remained as a figure, because despite his mother's connections, he was, he was self made. I mean, he had that fierce, maybe even competitive, sense of achievement through his family.

Tegan 10:28

Right.

Jessica 10:28

I mean, that's something a lot of North...as children of immigrants, or grandchildren of immigrants, that means something that somebody rose up, ultimately, to send some of their kids, at least, to Harvard, to give them the best education or opportunity that they possibly could have.

Tegan 10:44

Yeah.

Jessica 10:45

So there's a lot of respect for the Revere...but having this little wooden house, you know, really emphasizes that.

Tegan 10:52

Yeah, yeah. And I think that we often think, "oh, would Paul Revere recognize the Paul Revere House today?"

Jessica 10:57

Good point!

Tegan 10:58

Because as a museum, we've had to recreate some things. Some things are very accurate, and we know that because they haven't changed, or because they've been furniture that belonged to Paul Revere. And some things are, you know, something that is evocative of what he would have had, that's from the period, but didn't belong to him, for example. But just thinking about the neighborhood, there are a lot of ways in which this neighborhood is wildly different from his time. Maybe conceptually he would get "okay, so it's this multi-use neighborhood with a lot of different businesses, a lot of different people with various relationships to the neighborhood are living here." So those things might feel familiar to him. But I guess it might depend on what kind of a historical view he wanted to take. In your time in the North End...we touched a bit about kind of what was going on in your childhood. But what changes have made the biggest impression on you in the last you know, number of decades here in the North End?

Jessica 11:56

For me, because I have a very strong personal connection, it's always going to be first and foremost memories of people, even more than...strangely enough, because I'm an archeologist. But for me, not seeing the people of my childhood. I can conjure up very vividly...a lot more Italian was spoken. There still is a strong elderly presence, but that was something that you would see in stores. If I went to the meat market up the street on Richmond, there used to be Andy's Meat Market, where Villa Francesca is today. And Rico the butcher and his associate, they always had guys in there. It was just, you know, not just a store where you sold meat, like the Salmona today, on Parmenter. But, you know, these guys would be on benches. And then they'd sit there and talk, or just watch people come in and -- like me -- and do the daily errands after school.

Tegan 12:51

So it was a social place as well, it sounds like?

Jessica 12:53

There was a lot of socializing in that sense, you know, overlapping again, between generations. There's a little bit less of that. You know, the...definitely, people's work lives have influenced how they come in and out of the neighborhood. I mean, there's a huge exodus, like I saw today at eight o'clock in the morning. You know, people heading downtown, or maybe toward the direction of the hospitals, or

wherever. But yeah, when my mother first came to the North End, just to emphasize this point, she was from the West End, which is not too far away. (Laughs)

Tegan 13:24

No, it's walking distance.

Jessica 13:26

Right, it's Revere walking distance.

Tegan 13:28

Yeah.

Jessica 13:28

But she...from an Irish, English, German background, basically. Red hair, blue eyes. I don't resemble her. She was puzzled. She's like, "why are all these people outside during the day, aren't they at work?" She didn't understand. And you know, when I was very young, it was just before the finishing of what's now Christopher Columbus Park. So the nearest playground was North Square. And yeah, that was one of the places where she would just be sitting there watching me, kind of...I don't know what I would have done in North Square, just crawled on the cobblestones or swung on the chains. I remember doing that. And she said sometimes she'd feel this tug at her long red hair, and she'd turn around and somebody was just like pulling it.

Tegan 14:14

Huh.

Jessica 14:14

It was just so extraordinary to see this bright red-haired person in the middle of North square.

Tegan 14:21

Yeah, that's interesting. She's being treated as a novelty, almost.

Jessica 14:25

Yeah. But she got, you know...she was with my dad, so she got the connection, through my grandfather, who, you know, was a tough guy in a tavern. You knew who she was.

Tegan 14:35

Yeah. So, switching gears a little bit, you mentioned that you're an archeologist, and I know you also have some background in historic preservation. Can you tell me briefly of the story of your career? And do you see any connections between your research and your understanding of North End history? Even though I know the North End isn't what you were researching, particularly.

Jessica 14:53

This is a great question, because, yes. I can trace it all the way back to being in the North End.

Tegan 14:58

Yeah?

Jessica 14:59

And that's the only way it makes sense to say, "yes, I studied archeology at the Vatican." My research interest was, and is, for my dissertation, catacombs used by Jews. The Christian catacombs, the ones with the saints and the popes...very early Christian like third, fourth, fifth century, they tend to be better known and easier to visit. But when I was a kid in the North End, and I have, like, tangible proof of this, I was really fascinated by the visualization of what seemed to be really ancient stuff. Sacred Heart, like St Leonard's today, both of them still have multiple statues and side chapels in the statuary. I mean, it's plaster, it's painted, it's it's gaudy, it's remnants of the Italian village folk religion, really. But it, you know, led to a real interest in the antiquity of these beliefs. You know, how all these beliefs and how emotional... you know, people were really emotionally attached to them. So I wanted to understand, you know, why religion doesn't die, so to speak, at least not in the North End. I mean, if you're here for a couple of weekends during the summer, it's extraordinary to see these processions out in the streets, because the Saint's feasts have changed and become definitely... like, I don't remember, you know, cigar guy here. Or I don't remember quite as many souvenir stands when I was a kid, but much more frying grease. There's a lot of that still. And the other thing is, you know, just even the stores, everything was just very...things, you know, kind of connected me to place. And that's why I was interested in archeology, because having things, or looking at artifacts, helped me conceptualize unwritten kinds of history that's communicated. The logic of it all, I guess, or the sense of it, like, "they would have needed to do this." They wouldn't have had plastic. They would have had to have, obviously, vessels and different materials. Well, how would they get them? And-

Tegan 17:00

Something you mentioned earlier about the Italian churches here, I remember -- because I'm not from the North End -- when I first started working here, I visited some churches and was struck by just the brightness of color and the amount of color in the Italian Catholic tradition, which is so different from other congregations that I've visited both around here and in other parts of the world. It's striking. It's bright. And I feel like that is present in some of the other things, like the saints feasts that you mentioned, and the festivals that are just kind of very bright and vivacious. You know, your research is catacombs, which I imagine are not necessarily bright.

Jessica 17:38

(Laughs)

Tegan 17:38

I'm kind of imagining that just striking visual culture would leave a real impact or a real impression growing up, and then if you're starting to study material culture in other ways.

Jessica 17:48

Yeah, these stories often go back -- like St Lucy -- go back to the time of the catacombs, or Sant'agrippina from Sicily. Qualifier here, I am not of Sicilian descent. So I come from family north and south of Italy, Piacenza and Chiusano di San Domenico. The Chiusanese don't have their own feast

anymore. Monte Falcione, which is the next town over, has St Anthony's. So maybe I could be adopted into that clan. But just saying that these were traditions kind of brought here, some of it out of necessity. There's that story that you could always tell a Bostonian, because they would know what was represented on the weather vane at Faneuil Hall. If they said "grasshopper," you knew that they were the real deal.

Tegan 18:35
Right.

Jessica 18:35
These saints, they represented really a whole network of assistance, sodality, financial as well that, you know, was perpetuated, and in some ways still is perpetuated more as a social network today than a business club. But it's still big business. Going back to what you mentioned about the pagentry of this, it really was the way that they express their success, I guess in this culture, keeping in mind that constant go back and forth. Several of my uncles would travel -- Great uncles -- would travel back and forth for business. A lot of if you're in liquor importing, or fruit importing, you often needed to make these business trips and leave the family behind, of course. When did it become less Italian...I guess when there was more property ownership here, people were a little bit more settled. The idea of coming here, working and then returning back and, you know, retiring with a nice little plot of land back in the home village was less appealing, even. Although today, I'm sure most people would, you know, a lot of people would love that idea.

Tegan 19:42
Yeah, yeah.

Jessica 19:43
Absolutely.

Tegan 19:44
And today, there are also a lot of people who have really deep roots in the North End, but who are now in the Boston suburbs where they live.

Jessica 19:50
Yeah.

Tegan 19:50
So they do have that plot of land, and they're not all living on top of one another. And I know that there's different cultural reactions to that. And that's true not just for the North End, but for many places. You know, are you with your roots, or are you in a place where you can spread out? And both of those things have their advantages, but...

Jessica 20:06
It's funny, the historical society really, you know...people respond to it often from...you know, or are engaged in it precisely because it helps them reconnect to their roots. Just yesterday, actually, I got a

package in the mail from Rochester, New York. And I open it, and it is a professor who wrote a whole article about his ancestor, who was one of the founding members of St Mark's society, which was behind the acquisition and creation of Sacred Heart Church as an Italian church. So yeah, he was doing genealogical research. And Boston, of course, is now the home of American ancestors. So I imagine...

Tegan 20:06

Right, yeah, the genealogy center.

Jessica 20:12

You're going to get a lot more, a lot more people like wanting to explore their colonial roots. Or maybe...certainly getting more information about their, you know, where their ancestors may have lived in different parts.

Tegan 21:00

Right.

Jessica 21:01

So, yeah, it's definitely...people have more questions. They're not just walking around with a guidebook, you know, looking at the sites.

Tegan 21:09

Yeah, they're looking for their connection to the site. That's cool. It's funny you mentioned Rochester, because my family is not Italian American, but my mom grew up in an Italian neighborhood in Rochester. You know, small world that way.

Jessica 21:20

(Laughs.) Yes. Yeah, they have a great genealogical society there, though.

Tegan 21:24

Oh! That's great.

Jessica 21:24

So it's...this article was published in proceedings of...I guess they have a workshop for genealogy. I think he did a great job. He hasn't even been to the...he's been to the lower part of Sacred Heart. But I'm like, "come on back." You know, "we're gonna get you back for a Zoom lecture or something, or in person," and hear what...you know, hopefully he can encourage others to, yeah, really write it all down.

Tegan 21:24

Yeah...

Jessica 21:24

Because for now, right now, I love...you know, I do a lot of Facebooking for the Historical Society, because sometimes it's the only way people will open their mouth and share.

Tegan 21:24

And it's that informal kind of setting where they feel like they can do that.

Jessica 21:24

Yeah.

Tegan 21:24

Yeah. So tell me more about the North End Historical Society and tell our listeners whol, you know...I know a bit about it, but... (Laughs)

Jessica 21:24

(Laughs) Yeah.

Tegan 21:39

Can you give us some background? How long has it been around, and what's the organization's mission?

Jessica 22:13

Yes, as a nonprofit, it was founded in its current form -- because there have been historical societies in the past, in the North End, I think the Bicentennial, there was one active at that time. But without the internet, In '75-'76 it kind of vanished. This time we were incorporated in 2009.

Tegan 22:36

Okay.

Jessica 22:36

The Board of Directors...we still have one of the founding members on our board. You know, some people have moved to different places, or retired and moved to a lot farther away places. So the current board is really a mix of former North Enders, North End residents, and current North Enders. And that really, you know, represents pretty much a lot of our broader membership. We have over 300 members right now who are, you know, registered members. And many more, I guess, because I meet them sometimes at events, or other other events in Boston. They go, "oh, yeah, you guys, yeah...I'm on your news list, you know, your mailing list or something." So you know a lot more out there. In the beginning, the museum wasn't the main focus. What it really was is one, to get an actual historical society together. There really hadn't been one for decades, and we were lucky to have...our original founder had just published what I think is a really well-done guide on the North End. His name is Alex Goldfeld. And Alex did his master's thesis at UMass Boston in public history. So not only did he have a lot of the scholarly tools and work experience -- because he came to us as the Director of Visitor Services at the African American Museum up on Beacon Hill -- he also had this, you know, public historians commitment to bringing this history or engaging people with the history. So our mission statement really reflects that, that we try to bring people in, bring people to the table who have this...have knowledge or stories to share. And that still has remained our kind of foundational message, mostly in the early years,

up until...well, up until like 2015 or so, a lot of it was just Historical Society visits. We went to wonderful places, all Revere. We got a sneak preview of your visitors center!

Tegan 24:36

Oh yeah? That's great.

Jessica 24:37

Nina did the honors. So yeah, several of the directors were connected to Old North, so we were able to -- back when it wasn't that common to -- tour the bell tower, which you can do today, pretty much every day, and it's a wonderful experience. And also go to places like Mass Historical. There was, you know, an involved interest, and, you know, cultivation of Italian...the Italian side, but not just...you know, it was part of a broader vision. But we had the opportunity in 2014-2015 to collaborate on a documentary. I think it's called "Italians of the North End," or "North End Italians." And we have...it's, you know, watchable for free on our YouTube channel.

Tegan 25:21

I actually watched it fairly recently, and I quite enjoyed it!

Jessica 25:23

Thank you! (Laughs) My colleagues at the North End Historical Society, who were involved on it, they beat themselves up. I think...I think it's...I recognize a lot of the North End in it, not just the people, but a little bit of the perspective. And the film took up, you know, a lot of, you know, preparing the film and scriptwriting. But then in 2017 the film was done, and, you know, we filled -- I remember I was there, I think at least for a couple of the showings -- at St. Stephen's, North End Public Library. And seeing the reaction...some of the North Enders of Italian descent started to talk about, "wow, you know, like this kind of information we need to have a museum." And from 2017 that idea started to germinate. And two individuals in particular: now our current president, Tom, Tom Damigella, and Anthony, Anthony Riccio, who passed away in 2022. But he had been director of the North End senior center, drop in center, for several years, maybe six or seven years in the late 70s/early 80s. And he had a wealth of information, many publications on the stories he recorded, or the, you know, the contacts he made there. They were the two who really started to advocate for, you know, something a bit more permanent. Because as a historical society, we had had space, but we didn't have a public. And the idea was that maybe, rather than our office or lecture space, you know, bring something in that could show...you know, we could show people and engage people with history, not just on special occasions.

Tegan 26:15

Yeah, yeah. That's great.

Jessica 26:47

You know, one of my hopes for the North End Museum is that it is a launching pad for really exploring the fact that we basically still have a lot of the physical imprint. Unfortunately, not a lot of the older buildings. You know, as you know, we...they tore down a, what, 1795 building last year? So, you know, the North End's still not a historical district. Still not. Maybe it never will be. But we have a lot of the street layout which will help us convey a bit of that, as you said in the beginning, Tegan, the the idea of

this is a populous neighborhood and a neighborhood. You know, above all, the presence of people who make it and continue today.

Tegan 27:46

Yeah. So I know that the museum is a work in progress and that the goal is...Summer of 2026 is what's on the sign. Is that the...?

Jessica 27:54

(Laughs) Late summer of 2026, maybe.

Tegan 27:57

Yeah. So it will not have opened by the time this podcast episode aired, so it'll still be in the future. But can you tell me a little bit about the process of creating a museum like that? Who has been involved, and what the process has been.

Jessica 28:11

Yeah, it's...of course, it has evolved. I mean, we...the... when I say that we started talking about it in 2017, I wasn't even in the picture yet, except for occasional presenter for the...to the Historical Society. You know, it was...its focus at the time was largely Italian. I get this feeling, at least from what I remember being discussed at the time. And really it's through just the past couple of years and getting - - thanks to Paul Revere's house as well -- you know, a lot of really good speakers on different aspects of area history. You know, it's like North End, but area history. Really, the idea has become to focus on telling the story of the neighborhood, and that's involved a lot more digging and discovery that...you know, we're part of a bigger effort to document the neighborhood. And, you know, Paul Revere House is a standout in that regard, because you have an education department. Old North now has Old North Illuminated, which has done a lot of digging-

Tegan 29:17

Yeah.

Jessica 29:17

-into their congregants histories and away from...not away from the the Paul Revere story, but definitely a social experiment. You know, looking at Old North as kind of a social experiment.

Tegan 29:17

Yeah. And I had Nikki, the executive director of Old North Illuminated -- which is the nonprofit running the history part of the church -- I had her on the podcast last season. And, you know, something she said, is that Old North is famous for one minute in its history.

Jessica 29:43

(Laughs)

Tegan 29:43

And it's not that they want to downplay that one minute. And I mean, certainly we like that minute, because that's Paul Revere's minute in history. But you know, there's more to it than that as well.

Jessica 29:52

No, absolutely. And I think there's some plans coming up to look at old Copp's Hill, maybe do a documentary, or, you know, do new work at Copp's Hill.

Tegan 30:02

Yeah.

Jessica 30:02

And I know Joe Bagley is...always has in the back of his mind maybe a dig in the Prado, because-

Tegan 30:09

Ohh, yeah, that would be really interesting to have the city archeologist really be able to share. Because that had been a residential street before it was a plaza.

Jessica 30:09

Webster Lane. It wasn't always Webster Lane. It was something earlier.

Tegan 30:20

Yeah, I think Robinson's at one point.

Jessica 30:22

Robinson's Alley!

Tegan 30:23

Yeah.

Jessica 30:23

Exactly. And, you know, importantly, that's also where we have African Americans, Black residents in the North End, into the 19th Century. Because, while it's true, their church, their social...their institutions, many of them moved to Beacon Hill, there was still work on the wharves. There was still, you know, business interests in various parts of the North End which kept...and a school, even, here! Which needs more work done on it, but would have been on Sun Court. Perhaps behind, or roughly the back of Sacred Heart today, You know, away from the North Square entrance. But that's, you know...there's work in progress really on documenting that as well.

Tegan 31:02

Yeah.

Jessica 31:02

So it would be...it would be a great time to have a dig, at least to help us. Going back to what I said about, you know, thinking, having objects kind of spark your imagination. O, you know, ideas about the significance, or the reality, of life in different centuries.

Tegan 31:19

Yeah, yeah, absolutely. And by the way, I will link to a map in the show notes so that people can see the various landmarks that we're talking about. Because, you know, these street names mean something to us-

Jessica 31:31

(Laughs) We're dropping them!

Tegan 31:32

-yeah, and they'll mean something to a number of our listeners. And also, there will be a lot of listeners who don't know them, and that's great, too. So whether it's something that will be included in the new museum or not, what's your favorite fact about North End history that most tourists don't hear?

Jessica 31:47

Wow, so many details.

Tegan 31:49

Yeah, you could choose more than one. You could have more than one favorite.

Jessica 31:52

(Laughs) Well, just walking here I was...you know what a commute! I walk out my door on Fulton Street. I walk one block down Richmond, and boom, I'm at North Street and practically at the foot of North Square, close to the Paul Revere House. And I... you know, it's a beautiful day today. The weather is gorgeous out. And I looked up to the sky, but I also saw, at the corner right above Cirace's Liquor Store, that sign that says WTS 1654 or something, and then rebuilt 1850. And it just...there's no plaque, or any sort of historic tombstone kind of marker to explain what it is.

Tegan 32:37

Yeah.

Jessica 32:37

Yeah. It marks the site of the old Red Lion Inn. And Wadsworth, of course, is a name that resounded...it was on my mind approaching the Paul Revere House, because it reminds us, you know, that Longfellow's... some of his roots go back to this area.

Tegan 32:53

Yeah.

Jessica 32:54

Which ties into what you said at the beginning about the North End being an important residential area for early Boston. Boston was the, at times, the major port of the English colonies in America. Larger than Philadelphia for a while, I guess, before the French and Indian War, and New York, of course, other you know, big sea ports. So, yeah, we're looking for ways to identify just the small...what is it? Half a square mile territory-

Tegan 33:22
Right.

Jessica 33:23
-with a much broader picture of America. What other fun facts? Oh my goodness. Well, I've been in touch recently with somebody who...somebody else who thinks they've solved the mystery of the pirate tunnels. And that always comes up.

Tegan 33:37
Tell us about that mystery!

Jessica 33:38
The smugglers? Oh, the smugglers tunnels. You know, there are stories that crop up in North End that between the Old North End waterfront, which would now be like the North End parks, like Copp's Hill Park, you know, there used to be tunnels leading up the hill, Copp's Hill. Or at the foot of the hill ending in, some accounts have it, somebody's grave...somebody's basement...the basement of Old North, which Nikki says is not true. (Laughs) She's assured me of that.

Tegan 33:41
Yeah.

Jessica 33:44
But you know the...it's fun to see that, you know, North Enders of today adopt these stories, and they get, I would say, "better with the telling." But they tell them their way.

Tegan 34:18
Right, right.

Jessica 34:19
And there was recently...somebody else has made the claim that they have tunnels ending in their basement. Looks a little bit like a stove nook, but I'm just gonna keep quiet if I want my neighbors to speak to me. (Laughs) But yeah, people do...they just like hearing stories, because it's such an easy place with all of these, you know, these streets that some of them curve and some of them turn a blind corner or finish. You know, these little byways. You can see some of them through the gates. There's always a sense of "yeah, there's more. There's more to discover here." And we're doing it. We're trying.

Tegan 34:56

Yeah. Can we backtrack a moment? You mentioned the building that was the, I think you said, Red Lion Inn. Can you tell us a little bit more about that?

Jessica 35:03

Oh my goodness! I love it, because Nicholas Upsall was associated with that site. And he is another guy I wish we talked about more, because he was very open to...he's noted for offering assistance to Quakers who were imprisoned and harassed, moving to Boston, or coming to Boston, in the mid 17th Century. And in the end, he also came to be, you know...suffered persecution. But he was similarly, you know, abraded by the authorities for bringing them food in prison, for assisting them. So he's buried in Copp's Hill. So you can see...I like to go to Copp's Hill sometimes and just read the names on the tombstones, because it reminds me that these people, like me today, like my neighbors, they had full lives here.

Tegan 35:51

Right.

Jessica 35:51

And interesting, such interesting lives in many, many ways. So as we know, Revere is not here.

Tegan 35:58

Right, right. (Laughs) He's not too far away.

Jessica 36:00

No. And on the Freedom Trail, you come across Revere constantly. A little bit like Ben Franklin at the beginning. You know, you see his family's tomb, then you come across a statue, then you see his church, birthplace around the corner. So yeah, the...but there are many more people out there who, fortunately, we...these...this was a literate population. We have-

Tegan 36:22

Right, there are records that not everyone has, not every place has.

Jessica 36:26

Yeah. And I wish we knew more, but archeology might be able to tell us more.

Tegan 36:30

Yeah, absolutely. And I am hesitant to switch us back to Paul Revere, because we were just talking about how, you know, great it is to be able to tell these lesser known stories, or to ponder the the unknown stories. But do you have, you know -- having lived so much of your life adjacent to where Paul Revere was -- do you have a favorite either Paul Revere fact, or Paul Revere House fact, or story about your experiences here?

Jessica 36:54

Oh, man, I...you know, I always think his house over on Charter Street, the one we mentioned earlier as you know, being kind of the more...the success story. You know, when Paul Revere was wealthy

enough to really afford a free-standing brick mansion. After his death -- pretty soon after his death, I think 1819 -- it became the home for penitent women. So it was actually...a lot of the guests were reformed prostitutes. (Laughs) And it was, if I'd remember correctly, they have records of it through, like the early 1840s. And then, unfortunately, it was torn down. I guess they figured the real estate would be better, or you'd earn more off the land, by turning it into, like, separate residences. One, I guess, one building plot, you could get three houses-

Tegan 37:42

Right, right.

Jessica 37:43

-for Irish immigrants out of it. Or whoever was, you know, moving down to that dock area. What's another favorite? Oh, of course, it's, you know, my dad's lifelong friend Ralph Del Gaudio, and his stories about how he had Paul Revere's kitchen in the basement of a store, which, as you know, is right next door the gift shop today. So when we were kids, Ralph -- who, you know, his family's business originally clocks, jewelry -- he would take us down into the basement. And hey, you know, the foundation still had traces of the old brick arches, and-

Tegan 38:16

Oh, wow.

Jessica 38:17

Yeah, it was really...it was really neat. So that was like, basically the twin to the, you know, Paul Revere...

Tegan 38:22

Yeah, it was kind of a row house tyoe of situation.

Jessica 38:25

Exactly. And I know that thanks to the North Square stories, you know that group of four different sculptures that's in North Square today. There's one perspective where you're looking down North Square the way it was, perhaps...what is it? Around like 1775. And you can see the two houses, kind of like twins. So, yeah, that's...I don't know if it's true, but it shows that, you know...Ralph's kind of proximity to Revere. He really enjoyed the telling of the story. And-

Tegan 38:55

Right, yeah...

Jessica 38:56

Yeah. And one of my North End Historical Society co-directors, Vito Aluia, similarly, he can recite the whole spiel that-

Tegan 39:03

Yeah?

Jessica 39:04

Tour busses used to be able to come right to North Square and unload.

Tegan 39:08

Tour busses must have been narrower at the time. (Laughs)

Jessica 39:11

Oh, they seem to have been like Volkswagen busses. (Laughs) I mean, that's the only explanation. But if there was a way to do it, they did it. So yeah, he said the first one to get them would be following them and telling this. And they do it at Copp's Hill, similarly, you know, right around the entrance to the Copp's Hill burial ground. But Revere...oh my goodness, just walking down North Street today, do you see the new Revere? He's now an exercise studio mascot.

Tegan 39:37

Yes, yeah. No, revere turns up on all kinds of things in the North End, just various depictions of him. I've seen him on compost buckets.

Jessica 39:45

(Laughs)

Tegan 39:46

I think he's holding a carrot in that one, in the compost bucket.

Jessica 39:49

Yep, "be a good neighbor." He's still our mascot today, yes.

Tegan 39:54

Yeah.

Jessica 39:54

And that's a...that's a great thing. Because I think he's a good, good guy to know, you know, understand or know. And were lucky we do know a lot about him.

Tegan 40:01

Yeah, yeah.

Jessica 40:02

Thanks to you guys.

Tegan 40:03

Yeah. And I think that Paul Revere was very good at being kind of everywhere in Boston, and then giving the impression that he was kind of everywhere. So it's sort of fun that in the North End, he's still kind of everywhere in a very different sense.

Jessica 40:15
(Laughs)

Tegan 40:15
Obviously he's not getting any silversmith business by being on a compost bucket or an exercise studio, but he's everywhere in a different way.

Jessica 40:23
Yeah.

Tegan 40:24
Alright, well thank you so much for joining us on the podcast today, Jessica. And we will be linking in the show notes to more information about the North End Historical Society so that folks can learn more.

Jessica 40:34
Please do get in touch. We're here!

Tegan 40:37
Yeah, the museum space is...what? A block and a half from here? So, yeah.

Jessica 40:42
Yeah, we'll be neighbors!

Tegan 40:43
Yeah, yeah.

Jessica 40:43
Which is really cool. Right around the corner!

Tegan 40:48
And before we wrap up today, we have the last two of our high school interns who granted me a little micro interview at the end of their internship. Welcome to the podcast. Can you tell us your name?

Erin 40:59
I'm Erin Campbell.

Tegan 41:00
And what's one or two things that you learned about history this week?

Erin 41:03
Something that I found really interesting about the history that I learned this week was the multitude of perspectives and angles that you could take on it, especially when presenting it in a museum. And I thought it was really interesting how different people interpreted it, especially as we observed the

people that walked through the museum and, like, what they noticed and what they picked up. It really helped me to understand how people are presenting information, and how you can present it in effective way that most people will, like, pick up or find interesting.

Tegan 41:31

Awesome. Well, thank you for being on the podcast.

Erin 41:33

Yeah, thank you!

Tegan 41:42

Welcome to the podcast. Could you tell us your name and just tell us one or two things that you've learned about history this week?

Elena 41:49

Of course! My name is Elena Zagenjori. And something really interesting I've learned about history is more in the vein of how to think about history. We talked a lot during the week about the use of historical mythology and how that connects to sort of cultural themes and values. So what Paul Revere represents, not just in American history, but in general, in American cultural heritage, and the way we think about our national identity.

Tegan 42:10

Yeah.

Elena 42:10

So that was something that was really interesting for me, because I hadn't really thought about that, about how historical mythology happens, and really analyzing the way that we tell stories and how stories get passed down. But then in particular, a fact that really stood out to me was how many children Paul Revere had. First of all, because it's really astonishing: 16 children. But also because it was so interesting to see so many guests pounce on that particular fact.

Tegan 42:33

Yeah.

Elena 42:33

So many people are interested in that fact. That was such a common question, like, "he had 16 children??" So that interested me. It piqued my interest. But it was also very interesting to see how it piqued everyone else's interests, especially when I was observing.

Tegan 42:45

Yeah, very cool. Well, thank you. Thank you for your time.

Elena 42:48

Thank you for having me!

Tegan 42:51

Thank you for tuning in to Revere House Radio. I'm your host, Tegan Kehoe, and I am the Research and Adult Program Director here at the Paul Revere House. Our production team for this season includes Derek Hunter, Mehitabel Glenhaber, and Adrian Turnbull-Riley. Thank you to RP Hale for the use of his performance on the harpsichord as our theme music. If you're listening online, we encourage you to subscribe in your favorite podcast app so you never miss an episode. Revere House Radio is a production of the Paul Revere Memorial Association, the nonprofit which operates the Paul Revere House Museum. You can find more information, subscribe to our mailing list or social media, or become a member on our website at www.paulreverehouse.org. Or, come visit us in Boston!